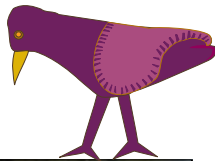


Turn Your Backyard into a WILDLIFE Refuge

Brutally cold weather sent shivers through the hardest northeasterners this winter and dipped temperatures south to turn the entire eastern seaboard into icy tundra. Even the all-weather birds flew to Florida in search for food and shelter. South Florida has always been haven for human “snowbirds,” and this year, most of the feathered ones flocked south, too – swelling our human and wildlife populations.

Now is the time to prepare for seasonal and year-round visitors. While early spring is when most northerners’ thoughts turn to their gardens, early summer can be an ideal planting season in Florida because it also heralds the start of plentiful rain.

Why not turn your backyard into a wildlife refuge for next year’s hungry foragers? Imagine waking up to the sounds of chirping birds as they hop from perch to perch tasting the bounty you provided – listening to nature’s symphony.



CREATE AN EARLY BIRD BUFFET

Anyone can bring nature a little closer to home by planting the right plants in the right places. Planting a wildlife refuge goes hand-in-hand with using Xeriscape principles, which also means saving water as well as your time and money. Instead of planting large expanses of grass (*which could consume 70 percent of your home water use*), plant drought-tolerant and low-maintenance plants. You’ll double your pleasure by also providing a wildlife refuge.

Many of Florida’s native plants attract birds with their bright colors and sweet nectars and fruits. To encourage the elusive hummingbird, plant their favorite nectarous blossoms in sunny habitats. The firebush boasts orange-red, tubular-shaped blossoms that almost look as if they were created to fit the tiny, elongated beaks of the fast-moving birds, but you’ll have to look quickly to catch them in hypersonic flight. Coral honeysuckle, cross vine and Jamaican caper are also alluring.

Fruit-laden cocoplums and seagraapes offer a terrific brunch for the red-breasted robins and wood thrushes that aren’t quite so skittish as they move between berry bushes. The gumbo-limbo tree produces clusters of red fruit enjoyed by mockingbirds and warblers. The succulent fruit of stoppers, West Indies cherry and hollies are natural picnic baskets for a variety of birds.

The plant list is endless for attracting other Florida birds such as the red-bellied woodpecker, chickadee, cardinal, bluejay and sparrow. A diverse mixture of trees, shrubs and vines will feed these birds year-round and provide habitat for nesting. Sweet additions to your backyard refuge are the beautyberry and wild coffee plant – shrubs with fleshy berries.

PREPARE A BOUNTIFUL BANQUET



You can start small and invite delicately beautiful butterflies in first with a garden designed just for them. Purple and yellow lantana and purple and pink porterweed, once regarded as unruly weeds, have now found a place in the natural landscape as butterfly plants. Watch the brilliant orange and black monarch butterfly flutter around a milkweed plant and chase the yellow and black zebra swallowtail landing lightly on the red-flowering jatropha. The sight brings a sense of giddiness even to the most somber.

Don’t forget the furry creatures. Suburban Florida is home to the cottontail rabbit – busily sniffing out green plants, woody blackberries, and tree bark. The lofty mammals such as the flying squirrel like to find cavities in mature oak trees. Bats (*don’t worry, they are nocturnal and their appetites for insects are insatiable*) sometime nest in Spanish moss.

Reptiles and amphibians are also our friends as they keep the insect population in check. Native ground covers are excellent habitat for these shy creatures – the box turtle, lizards, and even an occasional rat snake.

Plant your backyard wisely and share nature’s bounty. Next winter, when we have another blue-skied lousy day in paradise and the animals stop by, you’ll be able to offer a bountiful menu of munchies.



Xeriscape is water conservation through creative landscaping. It means using water-conserving, drought-tolerant plants in your yard or simply using the right plant in the right place, which also attracts wildlife.

Our new plant guide includes landscaping tips and listings of plants for WaterWise landscaping. Call us at (800) 432-2045 ext. 6883 for this free plant guide, or visit our web site (www.sfwmd.gov).

Recommended Alter *native* Plants

You may have one of the 10 most unwanted exotics in your yard. These are trees or plants that spread and crowd out Florida native plants or could be the culprits that require too much water and maintenance. We recommend: Get rid of those and try these.

If you have: Australian pine

You may want to replace it with:

- **Red Cedar** – the texture is almost identical and it responds well to shearing.
- **Slash or Sand pine or other native pines** – Australian pine is not a true pine; so, replace with a real one if you like pine needles.
- **Oak** – oaks are a classic shade tree. Use Live oaks and Laurel oaks.



Slash pine

If you have: Brazilian pepper

You may want to replace it with:

- **Dahoon holly** – the true Florida holly. It is a small to medium-sized compact tree that produces lots of shiny red berries in the fall and winter.
- **Seagrape** – this broad, spreading, multi-stemmed tree is great when you are trying to screen things you’d rather not see from your yard; can also be used as a hedge.



Dahoon holly

If you have: Carrotwood

You may want to replace it with:

- **Pigeon plum** – looks similar, but is more narrow and compact; can be used as an accent.
- **Mahogany** – good choice for shade. Sheds leaves in the winter and the seeds are in large cone-shaped pods; don’t plant near a driveway or patio.



Mahogany

If you have: Earleaf acacia

You may want to replace it with:

- **Paradise tree** – a most beautiful native tree, the peach-colored new growth of this large shade tree is a nice contrast in the landscape.
- **Soapberry** – fast growing and very drought-tolerant, it is not widely available so may take some hunting but well worth the search.



Paradise tree

If you have: Melaleuca

You may want to replace it with:

- **Silver buttonwood** – a small to medium tree (it is often trimmed into a hedge) and is upright and compact. Gnarled bark and fuzzy silvery-gray foliage will also give you contrast.



Silver buttonwood

If you have: Schefflera

You may want to replace it with:

- **Native palm trees** – Cabbage palm, Paurotis, and Thatch palm are upright and well suited to tight spots. The Paurotis takes on a shape very similar to Schefflera.
- **Shining sumac** – its shiny dark green leaves make it a good replacement for Schefflera.



Paurotis

If you have: Air Potato or Kudzu

You may want to replace them with:

- **Virginia creeper, Climbing aster and Coral honeysuckle** – all good native vine choices, they can all be used on trellises or fences.



Coral honeysuckle

